

The University of Edinburgh

Internal Periodic Review 14 week response report

Internal Periodic Review of: School of Social and Political Science PG Research

Date of review: 26-28th March 2025

Date of 14 week response:

Date of year on response:

The review area (School/Deanery/College) is responsible for reporting on progress with all recommendations, including those remitted to other areas of the University for action. If any recommendation has been fully addressed please record the action taken and date completed. Any barriers to progress should be highlighted on this report.

Rec. No.	Recommendation (copy text from report)	Responsibility of	Timescale for completion	Comment on progress towards completion and/or identify barriers to completion	Completion date
1	Student support (annual progression review) (relates to Subject specific remit: Supporting PGR student journey and success): The review team recommends that the School considers how annual progression reviews can be enhanced to ensure a shared understanding of a more robust requirement in every year of study, not just in 1st year. The School should consider developing key milestones to apply in all subject areas, and expectations on a written submission (including minimum word count) for each annual progression review.	School	Implementation for next annual review 'season' commencing May 2026	Actions Taken: • Updated annual progression review guidance already implemented for current AR review season to ensure in-person reviews every year. • New supervisor briefing email (with email archive) introduced to communicate directly with supervisors about requirements and developments, rather than relying solely on PGAs/subject areas to disseminate. In Development: • Development of key milestones to be discussed with PGAs at next committee meeting and with SPS L&T committee • Consultation process with subject areas to be established on discipline-appropriate milestones • Escalation procedures for annual review student progression issues to be formalised	
7	Student support (relates to subject specific remit: Supporting PGR student journey and success) The review team recommends that the School and College consider how gaps in student pastoral support can be bridged; as noted above there appears to be a reliance on voluntary effort from professional services staff and a lack of clarity around	School/College		In addition to the College response that follows, we are enhanced training and guidance for supervisors and PGAs on student progress monitoring. See our responses to recommendations 1 and 2. <u>College's response to this recommendation is as follows:</u>	

	mechanisms in place if the student-supervisor relationship breaks down.			The College is currently reviewing all Professional Services tasks, including PGR responsibilities, and this review should address future PGR student support provision. There is also a Doctoral College project, led by Andy Shanks, Director of Student Wellbeing, to review PGR student support. As part of the project, Schools were asked to provide a 'current status' update. A student intern is analysing the data, with a report expected by the end of July. If the student-supervisor relationship breaks down, the usual practice in Schools is for the School PGR Director (or Subject Area PGR Director) to speak to both parties and investigate ways forward. If a change in supervision is deemed necessary or appropriate, then the School PGR Director or Subject Area PGR Director would approach alternative supervisors. The College PGR Dean can provide advice if it is proving difficult to arrange alternative supervision. The University Postgraduate Degree Programme Regulations indicate that if the College is not able to provide alternative supervision, despite having undertaken reasonable endeavours, then the College may request that the Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee consider terminating supervision of the student as set out in the procedure for termination of supervision of Postgraduate Research students. This would only be a last resort, and it is expected that it would very rarely be applicable.	
2	Student support (supervision) (relates to Subject specific remit: Supporting PGR student journey and success) The review team recommends the School reviews its student support arrangements. Given the current model of student support, there is a risk of the supervisor becoming a single point of failure. A lot of responsibility is being channelled back to supervisors in	School		Actions Taken: • Regular supervisor briefing email – see above • DPGR induction sessions for new PGAs. In Development: • Enhanced training and guidance for supervisors and PGAs on student progress monitoring.	

	terms of student support, both academic and pastoral. The School should ensure awareness and clarity of expectations of supervision for both staff and students and explore opportunities for enhancing or expanding the PGA role.			• Doctoral College also working on broader PGR support framework, which we would like to clarify Student Services role in PGR and formalise support structures.	
3	Employability (relates to Subject specific remit: Supporting PGR journey and success) The review team recommends that, recognising the current HE climate, the School considers where there are opportunities to share practice across all subject areas to proactively prepare students for non-academic careers.	School	S1, 25/26	Planned: • Information gathering exercise across subject areas on current employability activities. • Student needs to be discussed at upcoming PGR committee and Staff-Student Liaison Committee. • Consultation meeting with PGR committee, SDO, IAD, and Careers Office to be scheduled. Regular consultation framework to update on School needs. • Doing more to promote internship opportunities such as those with the Scottish Government.	
4	Tutors and demonstrators The review team recommends that the School considers reintroducing consistent observation of teaching by staff and peer shadowing opportunities. Staff observation of Guaranteed Hours tutoring should be implemented to ensure there is at least one opportunity for tutors to be observed during their first year. This would support both the student and tutor experience. Furthermore, the School should consider setting consistent expectations on guidance available to tutors from Course Organisers.	School	COMPLETED	Actions Completed: • Staff observation system reintroduced. • Peer shadowing opportunities reinstated. • First-year observation requirement implemented. • Consistent guidance expectations from Course Organisers established. • Coordination with subject areas/directors of teaching/L&T committee completed. • Course Organiser Briefings for architecture of processes.	COMPLETED
5	Subject specific remit: Research culture and community: The review team recommends the School considers opportunities to build on existing good practice within the School such as	School	S1, 25/26	• Coordinating with the School Research Directors to extend regular invitations to PGR students to join research groups, creating a culture of welcome (see 6)	

	extending research group events and introducing standardised mechanisms so students can identify what research areas and activities staff are involved with.			• Ongoing efforts to improve staff profile pages with research interests and welcoming messages. • Good practice forum for subject areas to share activities and initiatives such as writing-up workshops.	
6	Communication The review team recommends the School considers the need for coherent, transparent and clear communications for both students and staff. The review team identified a positive move in the Communications Team developing the newsletter, however there may be opportunities for continued dialogue with students on what they need or would want to see in terms of communication (for example a calendar of events). The review team heard differing interpretations from staff on the reasons behind recent changes to Guaranteed Hours tutor allocations and considers that clearer communication would aid understanding of why these and future decisions are taken. The review team recommends that the School communicates to staff to ensure they are aware of the option to include publications in a PhD thesis, and how this works.	School	S1, 25/26	Actions Taken: • New Community Fund established. In Progress: • Continued development of Research Group communication. • Communication to PGAs requesting Research Group directors invite new students. • Enhance intra-School communication about writing-up meetings and PGR subject area conferences. • Establish good practice forum for PGRs/PGAs (joint meeting of PGR committee and PGR SSLC)	
8	Student voice: The review team recommends that the School considers appropriate ways of closing the feedback loop for students, for example “you said we did”, to ensure students are aware of how their feedback has been addressed. The School should consider mechanisms for increasing the visibility and communication of action taken in response to student feedback.	School	S1 25-26	Actions Completed: • PGR/PGT email communication format updated. • Enhanced transparency on decision-making processes, esp. decisions taken in consultation with PGR student reps., e.g. in recent communication of PGR Support Fund reforms. In Progress: • PGR SharePoint site updates begun. • The new university Student Voice Policy will also create pathways to ensure all students can give feedback and participate in dialogue about their learning and experience through inclusive and transparent mechanisms at all levels.	

9	The review team recommends that the Doctoral College explores how socioeconomic data relating to PGRs can be captured. The review team considers that demographic data collected for PGR students should ideally, for the purpose of widening access, mirror that collected on undergraduate students. Enhanced data would support the School and the University in strategic planning to support widening access to postgraduate research study.	Doctoral College	Reporting back during the academic year 25-26	The Doctoral College Operations Group has recently agreed to establish a short-life working group tasked with enhancing the collection and use of PGR-relevant EDI data to support our ambitions for PGR recruitment and monitoring. PGR EDI data has been raised by Schools and in other recent IPRs as a critical barrier to progressing with our EDI plans.	
	Please report on steps taken to feedback to student on the review outcomes				
Year on response only	Any examples of a positive change as a result of the review				